Eliminating Achievement Gaps for all Students in Kentucky

VISION

Kentucky has moved beyond having disabled, limited English proficient, African American, male, socio-economically disadvantaged or state agency students that are categorically unsuccessful learners. The state has eliminated achievement gaps among these student populations because all students learn at high levels, every teacher works to assist every child, attention is given to each individual student, holistic systems and approaches to serving all students prevent any student from getting lost, and the expectation of success for all students is commonplace among all students, teachers, leaders, and communities.

MISSION

To accomplish this goal, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) must dispel myths and attitudes, change beliefs through practice, and foster collective efforts to eliminate any and all achievement gaps through:

- Taking a set of actions with partners;
- Examining internal practices;
- Providing extensive supports to districts and schools in meeting the needs of all students; and
- Effectively communicating what we believe and expect for all students.

ACHIEVING THE TASK

KDE recognizes and acknowledges that eliminating achievement gaps for all children is a huge task that involves challenging assumptions and practices and tackling the notion that the problem is caused by "the child" as opposed to adult practices; however, it is a direction we must take to ensure proficiency and beyond for each and every child. The task is daunting and presents many unique issues; however, we are given an advantage by schools and districts that have accepted the challenges and have begun to successfully eliminate or close these gaps.

Eliminating these gaps is also an extensive task with many steps and a long range; therefore, we have selected below the actions we will strategically take over the next *two years* that we believe can have the most impact. These activities and strategies will be the collective work of all KDE staff and will be led by those individuals involved in the achievement gap work (highly skilled educators, district support facilitators, achievement gap coordinators and other KDE staff).

Activities	Timeline
1. Partnerships	Start: July 2005
KDE will establish <i>collaborative partnerships</i> with institutions of	
higher education, KSBA, the Educational Professional Standards	
Board, the Kentucky Association for School Councils, cooperatives, the	
Center for School Safety, community and business organizations, the	
Prichard Committee, and KEA that will:	
A. Foster a joint commitment and belief that all children can learn at high levels	
B. Produce and disseminate a common and shared message and	
guiding principles about eliminating the achievement gap	
C. Facilitate honest, open, and candid discussions about sensitive culture, race and poverty issues	
D. Agree upon and share a common definition of achievement gap	
E. Define skills and competencies to be provided in pre-service	
programs so that teachers and leaders can effectively eliminate the achievement gap	
F. Plan and provide joint professional development and services in	Implementation and
eliminating the achievement gap	Impact Checks:
G. Facilitate the effective use of available resources	December 2005, June 2006
This communication will be ongoing and frequent with follow-up on	
implementation and progress to ensure culture shift and sustainability.	
 2. Internal Practices KDE will examine its internal practices and procedures: Implement and evaluate the refocusing secondary plan, early childhood plan, limited English proficiency plan, literacy plan, and special education gap plan and use achievement gap as the thread that runs through all of these plans. Intentionally consolidate and focus these efforts with achievement gap as the filter Engage and facilitate candid and honest conversations within the department around the issues of culture, race and poverty Adopt a common working definition, beliefs, and practice around closing the gap (all department staff) Continue and improve hiring and evaluation practices that ensure the belief that all children can learn at high levels; use a set of criteria and engaging questions Focus on the achievement gap in all KDE professional 	Start: August 2005
development	
 Review all internal operations and procedures to ensure they do not create or impose barriers to eliminating the gap for schools and districts 	Implementation and
 Devote time for researching best practices for curriculum and 	Impact Check:
instruction, support services, professional development, data	December 2005
analysis, diagnostic assessment and organizational structures	

- Streamline the reporting of data
- Expand the Closing the Achievement Gap Plan to address the needs of all student groups
- Examine and recommend tools/programs that relieve the burden on schools--menu of effective programs

3. Supporting the roles of districts and schools KDE will provide extensive support and assistance to districts and schools to ensure they design systems and programs to produce improved results for students. They will assist districts in:

Dispelling myths and attitudes by

- Sharing examples, experiences, interactions, and practices that demonstrate success for all students
- Sharing examples of teachers successfully teaching all children

Changing beliefs through practice and challenging adult assumptions by

- Providing professional development on appropriate supports that meet learning needs so that students may be served in a collaborative versus isolated setting
- Providing mechanisms for reviewing all practices and procedures to ensure they do not create or impose barriers to eliminating the gap
- Providing a compendium of appropriate and effective diagnostic tools and training on their use
- Providing job descriptions that include the skills and competencies that districts should look for in teachers and leaders
- Providing models that show how to support all students in a collaborative manner versus services in isolation (holistic approach)
- Facilitating professional development that provides honest, candid discussions on culture, race, poverty
- Encouraging effective assignment of staff to meet students' needs (assign the most skilled staff to the most in need)
- Sharing results of the pilot regarding differentiated compensation/master teacher
- Identifying bad practices that create barriers to student learning and providing examples of alternatives

Start: August 2005

Implementation and Impact Checks: December 2005, June 2006

- Providing information on leveraging human and fiscal resources
- Providing tools and questions that challenge all staff to address the needs of all children